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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Office of Administrative Appeals, MS 2090
Washington, DC 20529-2090



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

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FILE: [REDACTED]
LIN-07-014-52907

Office: NEBRASKA SERVICE CENTER

Date: JUL 13 2010

IN RE: Petitioner: [REDACTED]
Beneficiary: [REDACTED]

PETITION: Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker as a Member of the Professions Holding an Advanced Degree or an Alien of Exceptional Ability Pursuant to Section 203(b)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

[REDACTED]

INSTRUCTIONS:

Enclosed please find the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All of the documents related to this matter have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Please be advised that any further inquiry that you might have concerning your case must be made to that office.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied by us in reaching our decision, or you have additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reconsider or a motion to reopen. The specific requirements for filing such a request can be found at 8 C.F.R. § 103.5. All motions must be submitted to the office that originally decided your case by filing a Form I-290B, Notice of Appeal or Motion, with a fee of \$585. Please be aware that 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i) requires that any motion must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider or reopen.

Thank you,

Perry Rhew
Chief, Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The Director, Nebraska Service Center, denied the employment-based immigrant visa petition, which is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is an information technology company. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a software engineer pursuant to section 203(b)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2). As required by statute, a Form ETA 750,¹ Application for Alien Employment Certification (ETA 750), approved by the Department of Labor (DOL), accompanied the petition. Upon reviewing the petition, the director determined that the beneficiary did not satisfy the minimum level of education stated on the labor certification. Specifically, the director determined that the beneficiary did not possess a bachelor's degree. The director also determined that the petitioner failed to establish ability to pay the proffered wage from the priority date to the present. The petition was denied accordingly.

On appeal, counsel asserts that the beneficiary qualifies for the second preference classification based on the educational evaluation and the letter from [REDACTED], Director of Business and [REDACTED]. Counsel also asserts that the petitioner has shown sufficient ability to pay the proffered wage based on its net income and net assets.

The record shows that the appeal is properly and timely filed, and makes a specific allegation of error in law or fact. The procedural history in this case is documented by the record and incorporated into the decision. Further elaboration of the procedural history will be made only as necessary.

In pertinent part, section 203(b)(2) of the Act provides immigrant classification to members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent and whose services are sought by an employer in the United States. An advanced degree is a United States academic or professional degree or a foreign equivalent degree above the baccalaureate level. 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(2). The regulation further states: "A United States baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent degree followed by at least five years of progressive experience in the specialty shall be considered the equivalent of a master's degree. If a doctoral degree is customarily required by the specialty, the alien must have a United States doctorate or a foreign equivalent degree." *Id.*

The AAO conducts appellate review on a *de novo* basis. See *Soltane v. DOJ*, 381 F.3d 143, 145 (3d Cir. 2004). The AAO considers all pertinent evidence in the record, including new evidence properly submitted upon appeal.²

¹ After March 28, 2005, the correct form to apply for labor certification is the Form ETA 9089.

² The submission of additional evidence on appeal is allowed by the instructions to the Form I-290B, which are incorporated into the regulations by the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 103.2(a)(1). The record in the instant case provides no reason to preclude consideration of any of the documents newly

The record contains the beneficiary's certificates for completing courses and/or passing examinations from Automated Data Systems Limited London (ADS), the School of Computer Technology London (SCT), City and Guilds of London Institute, the National Centre for Information Technology (NCIT), Kurukshetra College Computer Centre (KCCC) in New Delhi, India Small Industries Development Organization, Microsoft, USA Tech, and Siebel Univewrsity. The record also contains the beneficiary's transcripts issued by Indira Gandhi National Open University for his term-end exams in December 1999, December 2000 and December 2001. Thus, the issues are whether each diploma, certificate or transcript is on its own a single source foreign equivalent to a U.S. baccalaureate degree, and if not, whether it is appropriate to consider the combination of all the beneficiary's education to be the single source equivalent to a U.S. baccalaureate degree. We must also consider whether the beneficiary meets the job requirements of the proffered job as set forth on the labor certification.

Eligibility for the Classification Sought

As noted above, the ETA 750 in this matter is certified by DOL. DOL's role is limited to determining whether there are sufficient workers who are able, willing, qualified and available and whether the employment of the alien will adversely affect the wages and working conditions of workers in the United States similarly employed. Section 212(a)(5)(A)(i) of the Act; 20 C.F.R. § 656.1(a).

It is significant that none of the above inquiries assigned to DOL, or the remaining regulations implementing these duties under 20 C.F.R. § 656, involve a determination as to whether or not the alien is qualified for a specific immigrant classification or even the job offered. This fact has not gone unnoticed by federal circuit courts. See *Tongatapu Woodcraft Hawaii, Ltd. v. Feldman*, 736 F. 2d 1305, 1309 (9th Cir. 1984); *Madany v. Smith*, 696 F.2d 1008, 1012-1013 (D.C. Cir. 1983).

The AAO is bound by the Act, agency regulations, precedent decisions of the agency and published decisions from the circuit court of appeals from whatever circuit that the action arose. See *N.L.R.B. v. Ashkenazy Property Management Corp.*, 817 F.2d 74, 75 (9th Cir. 1987) (administrative agencies are not free to refuse to follow precedent in cases originating within the circuit); *R.L. Inv. Ltd. Partners v. INS*, 86 F. Supp. 2d 1014, 1022 (D. Haw. 2000), *aff'd* 273 F.3d 874 (9th Cir. 2001) (unpublished agency decisions and agency legal memoranda are not binding under the APA, even when they are published in private publications or widely circulated).

A United States baccalaureate degree is generally found to require four years of education. *Matter of Shah*, 17 I&N Dec. 244 (Reg'l. Comm'r. 1977). This decision involved a petition filed under 8 U.S.C. §1153(a)(3) as amended in 1976. At that time, this section provided:

Visas shall next be made available . . . to qualified immigrants who are members of the professions

The Act added section 203(b)(2)(A) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. §1153(b)(2)(A), which provides:

submitted on appeal. See *Matter of Soriano*, 19 I&N Dec. 764 (BIA 1988).

Visas shall be made available . . . to qualified immigrants who are members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent

Significantly, the statutory language used prior to *Matter of Shah*, 17 I&N Dec. at 244 is identical to the statutory language used subsequent to that decision but for the requirement that the immigrant hold an advanced degree or its equivalent. The Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference, published as part of the House of Representatives Conference Report on the Act, provides that “[in] considering equivalency in category 2 advanced degrees, it is anticipated that the alien must have a bachelor’s degree with at least five years progressive experience in the professions.” H.R. Conf. Rep. No. 955, 101st Cong., 2nd Sess. 1990, 1990 U.S.C.C.A.N. 6784, 1990 WL 201613 at 6786 (Oct. 26, 1990).

At the time of enactment of section 203(b)(2) of the Act in 1990, it had been almost thirteen years since *Matter of Shah* was issued. Congress is presumed to have intended a four-year degree when it stated that an alien “must have a bachelor’s degree” when considering equivalency for second preference immigrant visas. We must assume that Congress was aware of the agency’s previous treatment of a “bachelor’s degree” under the Act when the new classification was enacted and did not intend to alter the agency’s interpretation of that term. See *Lorillard v. Pons*, 434 U.S. 575, 580-81 (1978) (Congress is presumed to be aware of administrative and judicial interpretations where it adopts a new law incorporating sections of a prior law). See also 56 Fed. Reg. 60897, 60900 (Nov. 29, 1991) (an alien must have at least a bachelor’s degree).

In 1991, when the final rule for 8 C.F.R. § 204.5 was published in the Federal Register, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (the Service), responded to criticism that the regulation required an alien to have a bachelor’s degree as a minimum and that the regulation did not allow for the substitution of experience for education. After reviewing section 121 of the Immigration Act of 1990, Pub. L. 101-649 (1990), and the Joint Explanatory Statement of the Committee of Conference, the Service specifically noted that both the Act and the legislative history indicate that an alien must have at least a bachelor’s degree:

The Act states that, in order to qualify under the second classification, alien members of the professions must hold “advanced degrees or their equivalent.” As the legislative history . . . indicates, the equivalent of an advanced degree is “a bachelor’s degree with at least five years progressive experience in the professions.” Because neither the Act nor its legislative history indicates that bachelor’s or advanced degrees must be United States degrees, the Service will recognize foreign equivalent degrees. But both the Act and its legislative history make clear that, in order to qualify as a professional under the third classification or to have experience equating to an advanced degree under the second, *an alien must have at least a bachelor’s degree.*

56 Fed. Reg. 60897, 60900 (Nov. 29, 1991) (emphasis added).

There is no provision in the statute or the regulations that would allow a beneficiary to qualify under section 203(b)(2) of the Act as a member of the professions holding an advanced degree with anything less than a full baccalaureate degree. More specifically, a three-year bachelor's degree will not be considered to be the "foreign equivalent degree" to a United States baccalaureate degree. *Matter of Shah*, 17 I&N Dec. at 245. In the instant case, the petitioner submitted the beneficiary's transcripts from Indira Gandhi Open University for his three-year bachelor's degree in computer application, but it is not the foreign equivalent degree to a U.S. baccalaureate degree because of the three year degree. Furthermore, the petitioner did not submit the beneficiary's degree and the transcripts do not indicate that the beneficiary has ever been awarded a bachelor's degree from this university. In addition, the transcripts show that the beneficiary successfully completed 17 courses but failed 20 courses. Certificates from Kurukshetra College Computer Centre in New Delhi and Siebel University certify that the beneficiary completed a course with that college or university. Other certificates and diplomas submitted in the record certify that the beneficiary completed a course or training with them. Therefore, the transcript, diploma or certificate alone is not the foreign equivalent degree to a U.S. baccalaureate degree, nor is it a single source equivalent degree. Where the analysis of the beneficiary's credentials relies on work experience alone or a combination of multiple lesser degrees, the result is the "equivalent" of a bachelor's degree rather than a "foreign equivalent degree."³ In order to have experience and education equating to an advanced degree under section 203(b)(2) of the Act, the beneficiary must have a single degree that is the "foreign equivalent degree" to a United States baccalaureate degree. 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(2). As explained in the preamble to the final rule, persons who claim to qualify for an immigrant visa by virtue of education or experience equating to a bachelor's degree may qualify for a visa pursuant to section 203(b)(3)(A)(i) of the Act as a skilled worker with more than two years of training and experience. 56 Fed. Reg. at 60900.

For this classification, advanced degree professional, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(3)(i)(B) requires the submission of an "official academic record showing that the alien has a United States baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent degree." For classification as a member of the professions, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3)(ii)(C) requires the submission of "an official college or university record showing the date the baccalaureate degree was awarded and the area of concentration of study." We cannot conclude that the evidence required to demonstrate that an alien is an advanced degree professional is any less than the evidence required to show that the alien is a professional. To do so would undermine the congressionally mandated classification scheme by allowing a lesser evidentiary standard for the more restrictive visa classification. Moreover, the commentary accompanying the proposed advanced degree professional regulation specifically states that a "baccalaureate means a bachelor's degree received *from a college or university*, or an equivalent degree." (Emphasis added.) 56 Fed. Reg. 30703, 30306 (July 5, 1991). Cf. 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(3)(ii)(A) (relating to aliens of exceptional ability requiring the submission of "an official academic record showing that the alien has a degree, *diploma, certificate or similar award* from a

³ Compare 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(5) (defining for purposes of a nonimmigrant visa classification, the "equivalence to completion of a college degree" as including, in certain cases, a specific combination of education and experience). The regulations pertaining to the immigrant classification sought in this matter do not contain similar language.

college, university, *school or other institution of learning* relating to the area of exceptional ability”). In this case, the record contains no evidence showing that any diploma or certificate is a single foreign degree equivalent to a U.S. Bachelor’s degree, nor does the record contain documentary evidence establishing that any of the organizations in this matter, such as Automated Data Systems Limited London, the School of Computer Technology London, City and Guilds of London Institute, the National Centre for Information Technology, India Small Industries Development Organization, Microsoft, or USA Tech is a college or university that is entitled to grant a bachelor’s degree.

Because the beneficiary does not have a “United States baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent degree,” the beneficiary does not qualify for preference visa classification under section 203(b)(2) of the Act as he does not have the minimum level of education required for the equivalent of an advanced degree, namely a Bachelor’s degree plus five years of experience in the profession.

Qualifications for the Job Offered

Relying in part on *Madany*, 696 F.2d at 1008, the U.S. Federal Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit (Ninth Circuit) stated:

[I]t appears that the DOL is responsible only for determining the availability of suitable American workers for a job and the impact of alien employment upon the domestic labor market. It does not appear that the DOL’s role extends to determining if the alien is qualified for the job for which he seeks sixth preference status. That determination appears to be delegated to the INS under section 204(b), 8 U.S.C. § 1154(b), as one of the determinations incident to the INS’s decision whether the alien is entitled to sixth preference status.

K.R.K. Irvine, Inc. v. Landon, 699 F.2d 1006, 1008 (9th Cir. 1983). The court relied on an amicus brief from DOL that stated the following:

The labor certification made by the Secretary of Labor ... pursuant to section 212(a)[(5)] of the ... [Act] ... is binding as to the findings of whether there are able, willing, qualified, and available United States workers for the job offered to the alien, and whether employment of the alien under the terms set by the employer would adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed United States workers. *The labor certification in no way indicates that the alien offered the certified job opportunity is qualified (or not qualified) to perform the duties of that job.*

(Emphasis added.) *Id.* at 1009. The Ninth Circuit, citing *K.R.K. Irvine, Inc.*, 699 F.2d at 1006, revisited this issue, stating: “The INS, therefore, may make a de novo determination of whether the alien is in fact qualified to fill the certified job offer.” *Tongatapu*, 736 F. 2d at 1309.

The key to determining the job qualifications is found on ETA 750A. Item 14 of the form describes the terms and conditions of the job offered. It is important that the ETA 750 be read as a whole.

Moreover, when determining whether a beneficiary is eligible for a preference immigrant visa, USCIS may not ignore a term of the labor certification, nor may it impose additional requirements. *See Madany*, 696 F.2d at 1015. USCIS must examine "the language of the labor certification job requirements" in order to determine what the job requires. *Id.* The only rational manner by which USCIS can be expected to interpret the meaning of terms used to describe the requirements of a job in a labor certification is to examine the certified job offer *exactly* as it is completed by the prospective employer. *See Rosedale Linden Park Company v. Smith*, 595 F. Supp. 829, 833 (D.D.C. 1984) (emphasis added). USCIS's interpretation of the job's requirements, as stated on the labor certification must involve reading and applying *the plain language* of the alien employment certification application form. *See id.* at 834. USCIS cannot and should not reasonably be expected to look beyond the plain language of the labor certification that DOL has formally issued or otherwise attempt to divine the employer's intentions through some sort of reverse engineering of the labor certification.

In this matter, Item 14 of the labor certification reflects that four year college studies, a bachelor's degree in information systems or computer science is the minimum level of education required. The proffered position also requires five years of experience in the job offered, that is software engineer. The petitioner will accept a master degree and two years of experience in lieu of a bachelor's degree and five years of experience.

The certified labor certification clearly requires a four-year bachelor's degree in information systems or computer science as minimum educational requirement. The beneficiary does not possess a U.S. bachelor's degree or a foreign degree equivalent to U.S. baccalaureate degree, and therefore, the beneficiary does not meet the minimum educational requirements and is not qualified for the proffered position.

On appeal, counsel asserts that the beneficiary meets the minimum educational requirement because according to the evaluation from [REDACTED] of University of Phoenix Jersey City Campus the beneficiary has attained the equivalent of a bachelor of science degree in computer information systems from an accredited institution of higher education in the United States. The evaluation in the record used the rule to equate three years of experience for one year of education, but that equivalence applies to non-immigrant H1B petitions, not to immigrant petitions. *See* 8 CFR § 214.2(h)(4)(iii)(D)(5). The beneficiary was required to have a bachelor's degree on the Form ETA 750. The petitioner's actual minimum requirements could have been clarified or changed before the Form ETA 750 was certified by DOL. Since that was not done, the director's decision to deny the petition must be affirmed. USCIS may, in its discretion, use as advisory opinions statements submitted as expert testimony. However, where an opinion is not in accord with other information or is in any way questionable, the Service is not required to accept or may give less weight to that evidence. *Matter of Caron International*, 19 I&N Dec. 791 (Comm. 1988); *Matter of Sea, Inc.*, 19 I&N Dec. 817 (Comm. 1988).

Counsel also quotes the letter from [REDACTED] of the I [REDACTED] to counsel in

other cases, expressing his opinion about the possible means to satisfy the requirement of a foreign equivalent of a U.S. advanced degree for purposes of 8 C.F.R. 204.5(k)(2). Within the July 2003 letter, Mr. ██████ states that he believes that the combination of a post-graduate diploma and a three-year baccalaureate degree may be considered to be the equivalent of a U.S. bachelor's degree.

At the outset, it is noted that private discussions and correspondence solicited to obtain advice from USCIS are not binding on the AAO or other USCIS adjudicators and do not have the force of law. *Matter of Izummi*, 22 I&N 169, 196-197 (Comm. 1968); *see also*, Memorandum from Thomas Cook, Acting Associate Commissioner, Office of Programs, U.S. Immigration & Naturalization Service, *Significance of Letters Drafted By the Office of Adjudications* (December 7, 2000).

Moreover, the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(l)(3)(ii)(C) is clear in allowing only for the equivalency of one foreign degree to a United States baccalaureate, not a combination of degrees, diplomas or employment experience. Additionally, although 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(k)(2), as referenced by counsel and in Mr. ██████ correspondence, permits a certain combination of progressive work experience and a bachelor's degree to be considered the equivalent of an advanced degree, there is no comparable provision to substitute a combination of degrees, work experience, or certificates which, when taken together, equals the same amount of coursework required for a U.S. baccalaureate degree. We do not find the determination of the credentials evaluation probative in this matter. It is further noted that a bachelor's degree is generally found to require four years of education. *Matter of Shah*, 17 I&N Dec. 244 (Comm. 1977). In that case, the Regional Commissioner declined to consider a three-year Bachelor of Science degree from India as the equivalent of a United States baccalaureate degree because the degree did not require four years of study. *Matter of Shah*, at 245.

In addition, the AAO notes that while the petitioner through counsel is arguing that the beneficiary possesses a foreign equivalent degree and thus qualifies for the second preference classification on appeal, on March 4, 2009, the petitioner filed a new Form ETA 9089 Application for Permanent Employment Certification on behalf of the beneficiary for a position requiring high school education and three years of experience in the job offered. A new I-140 immigrant petition based on the new labor certification seeking to employ the beneficiary as a skilled worker pursuant to section 203(b)(3) of the Act was approved by the director of Texas Service Center on April 15, 2010.

The beneficiary does not have a "United States baccalaureate degree or a foreign equivalent degree," and, thus, does not qualify for preference visa classification under section 203(b)(2) of the Act. In addition, the beneficiary does not meet the job requirements on the labor certification. For these reasons, considered both in sum and as separate grounds for denial, the petition may not be approved.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2) states, in pertinent part:

Ability of prospective employer to pay wage. Any petition filed by or for an employment-based immigrant which requires an offer of employment must be accompanied by evidence that the prospective United States employer has the ability

to pay the proffered wage. The petitioner must demonstrate this ability at the time the priority date is established and continuing until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence. Evidence of this ability shall be either in the form of copies of annual reports, federal tax returns, or audited financial statements.

The petitioner must demonstrate the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date, which is the date the Form ETA 750 was accepted for processing by any office within the employment system of the DOL. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(d). The petitioner must also demonstrate that, on the priority date, the beneficiary had the qualifications stated on its Form ETA 750 as certified by the DOL and submitted with the instant petition. *Matter of Wing's Tea House*, 16 I&N Dec. 158 (Act. Reg. Comm. 1977).

The Form ETA 750 was accepted on May 30, 2003. The proffered wage as stated on the Form ETA 750 is \$88,213 per year. On the Form ETA 750B signed by the beneficiary on May 12, 2003, the beneficiary claimed to have worked for the petitioner since November 2001.

The petitioner must establish that its job offer to the beneficiary is a realistic one. Because the filing of a Form ETA 750 establishes a priority date for any immigrant petition later based on the Form ETA 750, the petitioner must establish that the job offer was realistic as of the priority date and that the offer remained realistic for each year thereafter, until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence. The petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage is an essential element in evaluating whether a job offer is realistic. *See Matter of Great Wall*, 16 I&N Dec. 142 (Acting Reg. Comm. 1977); *see also* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2). In evaluating whether a job offer is realistic, USCIS requires the petitioner to demonstrate financial resources sufficient to pay the beneficiary's proffered wages, although the totality of the circumstances affecting the petitioning business will be considered if the evidence warrants such consideration. *See Matter of Sonogawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (Reg. Comm. 1967).

In determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage during a given period, USCIS will first examine whether the petitioner employed and paid the beneficiary during that period. If the petitioner establishes by documentary evidence that it employed the beneficiary at a salary equal to or greater than the proffered wage, the evidence will be considered *prima facie* proof of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. In the instant case, the record contains the beneficiary's W-2 forms for 2004 through 2009. The beneficiary's W-2 forms shows that the petitioner paid the beneficiary \$54,644.65 in 2004, \$57,343.34 in 2005, \$65,464.51 in 2006, \$69,353.57 in 2007, \$70,415.28 in 2008, and \$77,160.80 in 2009. Therefore, the petitioner established that it employed and paid the beneficiary the partial proffered wage in these years, and the petitioner must demonstrate that it had sufficient net income or net current assets to pay the full proffered wage of \$88,213.00 in 2003 and the differences of \$33,568.35 in 2004, \$30,869.66 in 2005, \$22,748.49 in 2006, \$18,859.43 in 2007, \$17,797.72 in 2008 and \$11,052.20 in 2009 between wages actually paid the beneficiary and the proffered wage respectively.

If the petitioner does not establish that it employed and paid the beneficiary an amount at least equal to the proffered wage during that period, USCIS will next examine the net income figure reflected

on the petitioner's federal income tax return, without consideration of depreciation or other expenses. *River Street Donuts, LLC v. Napolitano*, 558 F.3d 111 (1st Cir. 2009). Reliance on federal income tax returns as a basis for determining a petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage is well established by judicial precedent. *Elatos Restaurant Corp. v. Sava*, 632 F. Supp. 1049, 1054 (S.D.N.Y. 1986) (citing *Tongatapu Woodcraft Hawaii, Ltd. v. Feldman*, 736 F.2d 1305 (9th Cir. 1984)); see also *Chi-Feng Chang v. Thornburgh*, 719 F. Supp. 532 (N.D. Texas 1989); *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc. v. Sava*, 623 F. Supp. 1080 (S.D.N.Y. 1985); *Ubeda v. Palmer*, 539 F. Supp. 647 (N.D. Ill. 1982), *aff'd*, 703 F.2d 571 (7th Cir. 1983). On appeal, counsel asserts that the petitioner's revenues and payroll indicated in the petitioner's letter and its certified public accountant (CPA)'s letter should be considered in determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. Counsel's reliance on the petitioner's gross sales and profits and wage expense is misplaced. Showing that the petitioner's gross sales and profits exceeded the proffered wage is insufficient. Similarly, showing that the petitioner paid wages in excess of the proffered wage is insufficient.

In *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc. v. Sava*, 623 F. Supp. at 1084, the court held that the Immigration and Naturalization Service, now USCIS, had properly relied on the petitioner's net income figure, as stated on the petitioner's corporate income tax returns, rather than the petitioner's gross income. The court specifically rejected the argument that the Service should have considered income before expenses were paid rather than net income.

With respect to depreciation, the court in *River Street Donuts* noted:

The AAO recognized that a depreciation deduction is a systematic allocation of the cost of a tangible long-term asset and does not represent a specific cash expenditure during the year claimed. Furthermore, the AAO indicated that the allocation of the depreciation of a long-term asset could be spread out over the years or concentrated into a few depending on the petitioner's choice of accounting and depreciation methods. Nonetheless, the AAO explained that depreciation represents an actual cost of doing business, which could represent either the diminution in value of buildings and equipment or the accumulation of funds necessary to replace perishable equipment and buildings. Accordingly, the AAO stressed that even though amounts deducted for depreciation do not represent current use of cash, neither does it represent amounts available to pay wages.

We find that the AAO has a rational explanation for its policy of not adding depreciation back to net income. Namely, that the amount spent on a long term tangible asset is a "real" expense.

River Street Donuts at 116. "[USCIS] and judicial precedent support the use of tax returns and the *net income figures* in determining petitioner's ability to pay. Plaintiffs' argument that these figures should be revised by the court by adding back depreciation is without support." *Chi-Feng Chang* at 537 (emphasis added).

The evidence in the record of proceeding shows that the petitioner was structured as an S corporation. According to the tax returns in the record, the petitioner's fiscal year is based on calendar year. The record contains the petitioner's federal income tax returns for 2003 through 2006. The record before the director closed on March 20, 2008 with the receipt by the director of the petitioner's submissions in response to the request for evidence. As of that date the petitioner's federal tax return for 2007 had not been available yet. Therefore, the petitioner's 2006 tax return is the most available one to be considered in determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage in this matter. The petitioner's tax returns demonstrate its net income for 2003 through 2006, as shown in the table below.

- In 2003, the Form 1120S stated net income⁴ of \$32,546.
- In 2004, the Form 1120S stated net income of \$20,662.
- In 2005, the Form 1120S stated net income of \$27,023.
- In 2006, the Form 1120S stated net income of \$47,166.

Therefore, for the year 2006, the petitioner had sufficient net income to pay the instant beneficiary the difference of \$22,748.49 between wages actually paid the beneficiary and the proffered wage. However, for the year 2003, the petitioner did not have sufficient net income to pay the instant beneficiary the proffered wage and for the years 2004 and 2005, the petitioner did not have sufficient net income to pay the instant beneficiary the differences of \$33,568.35 and \$30,869.66 between wages actually paid the beneficiary and the proffered wage respectively.

As an alternate means of determining the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage, USCIS may review the petitioner's net current assets. Net current assets are the difference between the petitioner's current assets and current liabilities.⁵ A corporation's year-end current assets are shown on Schedule L, lines 1 through 6. Its year-end current liabilities are shown on lines 16 through 18. If the total of a corporation's end-of-year net current assets and the wages paid to the beneficiary (if any) are equal to or greater than the proffered wage, the petitioner is expected to be able to pay the

⁴ Where an S corporation's income is exclusively from a trade or business, USCIS considers net income to be the figure for ordinary income, shown on line 21 of page one of the petitioner's IRS Form 1120S. However, where an S corporation has income, credits, deductions or other adjustments from sources other than a trade or business, they are reported on Schedule K. If the Schedule K has relevant entries for additional income, credits, deductions or other adjustments, net income is found on line 23 (2003), line 17e (2004-2005) or line 18 (2006) of Schedule K. See Instructions for Form 1120S, 2006, at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i1120s.pdf> (accessed on June 23, 2010) (indicating that Schedule K is a summary schedule of all shareholder's shares of the corporation's income, deductions, credits, etc.).

⁵ According to *Barron's Dictionary of Accounting Terms* 117 (3rd ed. 2000), "current assets" consist of items having (in most cases) a life of one year or less, such as cash, marketable securities, inventory and prepaid expenses. "Current liabilities" are obligations payable (in most cases) within one year, such as accounts payable, short-term notes payable, and accrued expenses (such as taxes and salaries). *Id.* at 118.

proffered wage using those net current assets. The petitioner's tax returns demonstrate its end-of-year net current assets for 2003 through 2005 as shown below.

- In 2003, the Form 1120S stated net current assets of (\$150,741).
- In 2004, the Form 1120S stated net current assets of (\$103,249).
- In 2005, the Form 1120S stated net current assets of (\$263,893).

For the year 2003, the petitioner did not have sufficient net current assets to pay the instant beneficiary the proffered wage, and for the years 2004 and 2005, the petitioner did not have sufficient net current assets to pay the instant beneficiary the differences of \$33,568.35 and \$30,869.66 between wages actually paid the beneficiary and the proffered wage respectively.

Therefore, from the date the Form ETA 750 was accepted for processing by the DOL, the petitioner had not established that it had the continuing ability to pay the instant beneficiary the proffered wage as of the priority date through an examination of wages paid to the beneficiary, or its net income or net current assets.

Counsel submitted the petitioner's financial statements as evidence to establish the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2) makes clear that where a petitioner relies on financial statements to demonstrate its ability to pay the proffered wage, those financial statements must be audited. An audit is conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards to obtain a reasonable assurance that the financial statements of the business are free of material misstatements. The accountant's report that accompanied those financial statements makes clear that they are reviewed statements, as opposed to audited statements. The unaudited financial statements that counsel submitted are not persuasive evidence. Reviews are governed by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants' Statement on Standards for Accounting and Review Services (SSARS) No.1 and accountants only express limited assurances in reviews. As the account's report makes clear, the financial statements are the representations of management and the accountant expresses no opinion pertinent to their accuracy. The unsupported representations of management are not reliable evidence and are insufficient to demonstrate the ability to pay the proffered wage.

Moreover, if the instant petition were the only petition filed by the petitioner, the petitioner would be required to produce evidence of its ability to pay the proffered wage to the single beneficiary of the instant petition. However, where a petitioner has filed multiple petitions for multiple beneficiaries which have been pending or approved simultaneously, the petitioner must produce evidence that its job offers to each beneficiary are realistic, and therefore, that it has the ability to pay the proffered wages to each of the beneficiaries of its pending and approved petitions, as of the priority date of each petition and continuing until the beneficiary of each petition obtains lawful permanent residence. *See Mater of Great Wall*, 16 I&N Dec. 142, 144-145 (Acting Reg. Comm. 1977) (petitioner must establish ability to pay as of the date of the Form MA 7-50B job offer, the predecessor to the Form ETA 750 and ETA Form 9089). *See also* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2).

In the instant case, the petitioner has filed additional Immigrant Petitions for Alien Worker (Form I-140). Among them, the petitioner was responsible to pay at least one more beneficiary the proffered wage for 2003 through 2009.⁶

The record contains no evidence that the petitioner had paid the additional beneficiary the full proffered wage during these relevant years. As previously discussed, in 2003 the petitioner did not have sufficient net income to pay one single proffered wage; in 2004 and 2005, the petitioner did not have sufficient net income to pay the differences between wages actually paid to the instant beneficiary and the proffered wage; and in 2006, while the petitioner's net income was just sufficient to pay the difference between wages actually paid to the instant beneficiary and the proffered wage that year, the petitioner did not have sufficient net income or net current assets to pay additional full proffered wage.

Therefore, from the date the Form ETA 750 was accepted for processing by the DOL, the petitioner had not established that it had the continuing ability to pay all beneficiaries the proffered wages as of the priority date through an examination of wages paid to the beneficiary, or its net income or net current assets.

USCIS may consider the overall magnitude of the petitioner's business activities in its determination of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. *See Matter of Sonegawa*, 12 I&N Dec. 612 (BIA 1967). The petitioning entity in *Sonegawa* had been in business for over 11 years and routinely earned a gross annual income of about \$100,000. During the year in which the petition was filed in that case, the petitioner changed business locations and paid rent on both the old and new locations for five months. There were large moving costs and also a period of time when the petitioner was unable to do regular business. The Regional Commissioner determined that the petitioner's prospects for a resumption of successful business operations were well established. The petitioner was a fashion designer whose work had been featured in *Time* and *Look* magazines. Her clients included Miss Universe, movie actresses, and society matrons. The petitioner's clients had been included in the lists of the best-dressed California women. The petitioner lectured on fashion design at design and fashion shows throughout the United States and at colleges and universities in California. The Regional Commissioner's determination in *Sonegawa* was based in part on the petitioner's sound business reputation and outstanding reputation as a couturiere. As in *Sonegawa*, USCIS may, at its discretion, consider evidence relevant to the petitioner's financial ability that falls outside of a petitioner's net income and net current assets. USCIS may consider such factors as the number of years the petitioner has been doing business, the established historical growth of the petitioner's business, the overall number of employees, the occurrence of any uncharacteristic business expenditures or losses, the petitioner's reputation within its industry, whether the

⁶ SRC-07-046-53595 filed on December 5, 2006 with the priority date of May 12, 2003, and approved on August 8, 2007. The beneficiary's I-485 application for adjustment of status (SRC-07-272-53271) was pending as of June 4, 2009.

beneficiary is replacing a former employee or an outsourced service, or any other evidence that USCIS deems relevant to the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage.

In the instant case, given the record as a whole, the petitioner's history of filing 41 immigrant and nonimmigrant petitions, the AAO must also take into account the petitioner's ability to pay the petitioner's wages in the context of its overall recruitment efforts. The petitioner failed to establish its ability to pay all proffered wages except for one single beneficiary in a single year. Thus, assessing the totality of the circumstances in this individual case, it is concluded that the petitioner has not established that it had the continuing ability to pay the proffered wages.

The burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. The petitioner has not met that burden.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.